

JOHN PINTO

May 24, 2019

NM mourns long-time state senator, John Pinto

By Andy Lyman



A screenshot of video showing Sen. John Pinto, D-Gallup, singing The Potato Song.

Long-time New Mexico state senator and Navajo Code Talker John Pinto died Friday morning. He was 94.

The longest serving member of the Senate, Pinto represented District 3, which includes a large section of western New Mexico. He served in the U.S. Marines as a Navajo Code Talker and went on to work as a teacher. Pinto was first elected in 1977 and hitchhiked from Gallup to Santa Fe for his first day in the Senate. As the story goes, he was picked up along the way by a driver who turned out to be then-Sen. Manny Aragon, also reporting for his first day in the Senate.

Pinto's legislative colleagues shared their thoughts about him Friday afternoon.

"This is an extraordinary loss to Senator Pinto's family, the state of New Mexico, the country and anyone who knew and loved him," Senate Majority Leader Peter Wirth said in a statement. "It was an incredible honor to serve with Senator Pinto."

U.S. Rep. Deb Haaland also paid her respects to Pinto and offered her "deep condolences to his family and to the Navajo Nation."

"Over the course of many years I have been fortunate to have spent time with Senator John Pinto," Haaland wrote in a statement. "From organizing in Indian Country to a visit to the Round House as a congresswoman, it was always clear Senator Pinto was a fierce advocate for the best interests of New Mexico."

A highlight of each session for many lawmakers was watching Pinto perform the "[Potato Song](https://nmpoliticalreport.com/2016/02/16/john-pinto-sings-the-potato-song-nmleg/)" (<https://nmpoliticalreport.com/2016/02/16/john-pinto-sings-the-potato-song-nmleg/>) on the floor of the Senate.

A press release from the Senate Democrats said services for Pinto are pending.

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